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they gave to her a new and wider popularity, and it is on them that her reputation will mainly rest. Her mind had been enriched by various study and travel; her style had been matured by long practice; and she had outgrown many of the faults manifest in her earlier productions. With these advantages, and after much special preparation, she entered on a field which had been scarcely touched by any previous writer; and she treated her attractive theme with a good judgment, a wealth of appropriate learning, and a purity of taste, which will secure for her work a permanent place in literature.

These volumes form an admirable legendary, in which the most popular of the legends of the mediæval Church are given as derived from the best authorities, while through these legends the art of the Middle Ages is illustrated, and the ideas and sentiments by which it was inspired — ideas and sentiments that are unfamiliar to the modern and Protestant world — are clearly exhibited and sympathetically reproduced. Her complete work (including the “Legends of the Madonna”) is an invaluable hand-book to the student of Christian Art, and scarcely less valuable to the student of the forms under which religious thought has manifested itself in the modern world.

The engravings with which the original editions of these volumes were illustrated make them too expensive for general circulation, and too cumbrous for the use of travellers, but the present very neat pocket edition brings them, in a convenient form, within the reach of all who may desire to possess them. We hope that their reception may be such as to induce the publishers to complete the series by reprinting in the same form the recent work on the artistic representation of Our Lord, begun by Mrs. Jameson, and completed since her death by Lady Eastlake.

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11. — *Azarian: an Episode*. By HARRIET ELIZABETH PRESCOTT, Author of “The Amber Gods,” etc. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1864. 16mo. pp. 251.

THE volume before us is characterized by that venturesome, unprincipled literary spirit, defiant alike of wisdom and taste, which has been traceable through Miss Prescott's productions, from “Sir Rohan's Ghost” downward. We looked upon this latter work, at the time of its publication, as the very apotheosis of the picturesque; but “Sir Rohan's Ghost,” “The Amber Gods,” and even “The Rim,” compared with “Azarian,” are admirably sober and coherent. Miss Prescott has steadily grown in audacity, and in that disagreeable audacity which seems to have

been fostered rather by flattery than by remonstrance. Let her pray to be delivered from her friends.

What manner of writing is it which lends itself so frankly to aberrations of taste? It is that literary fashion which, to speak historically, was brought into our literature by Tennyson's poetry. The best name for it, as a literary style, is the ideal descriptive style. Like all founders of schools, Tennyson has been far exceeded by his disciples. The style in question reposes not so much upon the observation of the objects of external nature as the projection of one's fancy upon them. It may be seen exemplified in its youthful vigor in Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women"; it is exemplified in its effete old age in Mr. Alexander Smith and Miss Prescott, *passim*.

The writer of a work of fiction has this advantage over his critic, that he can frequently substantiate his cause by an *a posteriori* scheme of treatment. For this reason, it is often difficult to fasten down a storyteller to his premises, and then to confront him with his aberrations. For each successive delinquency he has the ready excuse of an unimpeachable intention. Such or such a glaring blot is the very key-stone of his plan. When we tell Miss Prescott that some one of her tales is marvellously void of human nature and false to actual society, she may meet us with the reply that a correct portraiture of nature and society was not intended. She may claim the poet's license. And superficially she will have the best of it. But woe to the writer who claims the poet's license, without being able to answer the poet's obligations; to the writer of whatever class who subsists upon the immunities, rather than the responsibilities, of his task.

The subject of "Azarian" is sufficiently dramatic. A young orphan-girl—a painter of flowers by profession—allows herself to become engaged to a young Greek physician resident in Boston. Ruth is warm-hearted and patient; Azarian is cold-hearted, selfish, and an amateur of the fine arts, especially that of flirting. He wearies of Ruth before marriage,—slights, neglects, and drives her to despair. She resolves on suicide; but when on the brink of destruction, she pauses and reconciles herself to life, and, the engagement with Azarian being broken off by tacit agreement, to happiness.

What is the central element of the above data? The element of feeling. What is the central element of the tale as it stands written? The element of words. The story contains, as it need contain, but few incidents. It is made of the stuff of a French *étude*. Its real interest lies in the history of two persons' moral intercourse. Instead of this, we are treated to an elaborate description of four persons' physical aspect and costume, and of certain aspects of inanimate nature. Of hu-

man nature there is not an unadulterated page in the book, — not a chapter of history. From beginning to end it is a succession of forced assaults upon the impregnable stronghold of painting; a wearisome series of word-pictures, linked by a slight thread of narrative, strung together, to use one of Miss Prescott's own expressions, like "beads on a leash." If the dictionary were a palette of colors, and a goose-quill a brush, Miss Prescott would be a very clever painter. But as words possess a certain inherent dignity, value, and independence, language being rather the stamped and authorized coinage which expresses the value of thought than the brute metal out of which forms are moulded, her pictures are invariably incoherent and meaningless. What do we know of Ruth and Azarian, of Charmian and Madame Saratov? Next to nothing: the little that we know we learn *in spite* of Miss Prescott's fine writing. These persons are localized, christened (we admit in rather a pagan fashion), provided with matter-of-fact occupations. They are Bostonians of the nineteenth century. The little drama in which they have parts, or something very like it, is acted every day, anywhere between the Common and the river. There is, accordingly, every presumptive reason why we should feel conscious of a certain affinity with them. But from any such sensation we are effectually debarred by Miss Prescott's inordinate fondness for the picturesque.

There is surely no principle of fictitious composition so true as this, — that an author's paramount charge is the cure of souls, to the subjection, and if need be to the exclusion, of the picturesque. Let him look to his characters: his *figures* will take care of themselves. Let the author who has grasped the heart of his purpose trust to his reader's sympathy: from that vantage-ground he may infallibly command it. In what we may call subordinate points, that is, in Miss Prescott's prominent and obtrusive points, it is an immense succor. It supplements his intention. Given an animate being, you may readily clothe it in your mind's eye with a body, a local habitation, and a name. Given, we say, an animate being: that is the point. The reader who is set face to face with a gorgeous doll will assuredly fail to inspire it with sympathetic life. To do so, he must have become excited and interested. What is there in a doll to excite and interest?

In reading books of the Azarian school, — for, alas! there is a school, — we have often devoutly wished that some legal penalty were attached to the use of description. We have sighed for a novel with a *dramatis personæ* of disembodied spirits. Azarian gives his name to two hundred and fifty pages; and at the end of those pages, the chief fact with which he is associated in our minds is that he wore his hair in "waves of flaccid gold." Of Madame Saratov we read that she was the

widow of a Russian exile, domesticated in Boston for the purpose of giving lessons in French, music, and Russ, and of educating her boys. In spite of the narrowness of means attributable to a lady who follows the profession of teaching, she lives in a splendor not unworthy of the Muscovite Kremlin. She has a maid to haunt her steps; her chosen raiment is silks and velvets; she sleeps in counterpanes of satin; her thimble, when she sews, is incrustated at the base with pearls; she holds a *salon*, and treats her guests to draughts of "richly-rosy" cordial. One of her dresses is a gown of green Genoa velvet, with peacock's feathers of gorgeous green and gold. What do you think of that for an exiled teacher of languages, boasting herself Russian? Perhaps, after all, it is not so improbable. In the person of Madame Saratov, Miss Prescott had doubtless the intention of a sufficiently dramatic character,—the European mistress of a *salon*. But her primary intention completely disappears beneath this thick *impasto* of words and images. Such is the fate of all her creations: either they are still-born, or they survive but for a few pages; she smothers them with caresses.

When a very little girl becomes the happy possessor of a wax-doll, she testifies her affection for it by a fond manipulation of its rosy visage. If the nose, for instance, is unusually shapely and pretty, the fact is made patent by a constant friction of the finger-tips; so that poor dolly is rapidly smutted out of recognition. In a certain sense we would compare Miss Prescott to such a little girl. She fingers her puppets to death. "Good heavens, Madam!" we are forever on the point of exclaiming, "let the poor things speak for themselves. What? are you afraid they can't stand alone?" Even the most clearly defined character would succumb beneath this repeated posing, attitudinizing, and changing of costume. Take any breathing *person* from the ranks of fiction,—Hetty in "Adam Bede," or Becky Sharp the Great (we select women advisedly, for it is known that they can endure twenty times more than men in this respect),—place her for a few pages in Miss Prescott's charge, and what will be the result? Adieu, dear familiar friend; you melt like wax in a candle. Imagine Thackeray forever pulling Rebecca's curls and settling the folds of her dress.

This bad habit of Miss Prescott's is more than an offence against art. Nature herself resents it. It is an injustice to men and women to assume that the fleshly element carries such weight. In the history of a loving and breaking heart, is that the only thing worth noticing? Are the external signs and accidents of passion the only points to be detailed? What we want is Passion's self,—her language, her ringing voice, her gait, the presentment of her deeds. What do we care about the beauty of man or woman in comparison with their humanity? In a

novel we crave the spectacle of that of which we may feel that we *know* it. The only lasting fictions are those which have spoken to the reader's heart, and not to his eye ; those which have introduced him to an atmosphere in which it was credible that human beings might exist, and to human beings with whom he might feel tempted to claim kinship.

When once a work of fiction may be classed as a novel, its foremost claim to merit, and indeed the measure of its merit, is its *truth*,—its truth to something, however questionable that thing may be in point of morals or of taste. "*Azarian*" is true to nothing. No one ever looked like *Azarian*, talked like him, nor, on the whole, acted like him ; for although his specific deeds, as related in the volume before us, are few and far between, we find it difficult to believe that any one ever pursued a line of conduct so utterly meaningless as that which we are invited, or rather allowed, to attribute to him.

We have called Miss Prescott's manner the descriptive manner ; but in so doing we took care to distinguish it from the famous realistic system which has asserted itself so largely in the fictitious writing of the last few years. It is not a counsel we would indiscriminately bestow, — on the contrary, we would gladly see the vulgar realism which governs the average imagination leavened by a little old-fashioned idealism, — but Miss Prescott, if she hopes to accomplish anything worth accomplishing, must renounce new-fashioned idealism for a while, and diligently study the canons of the so-called realist school. We gladly admit that she has the talent to profit by such a discipline. But to be real in writing is to describe ; such is the popular notion. Were this notion correct, Miss Prescott would be a very good realist, — none better. But for this fallacious axiom we propose to substitute another, which, if it does not embrace the whole truth, comes several degrees nearer to it : to be real in writing is to express ; whether by description or otherwise is of secondary importance. The short tales of M. Prosper Mérimée are eminently real ; but he seldom or never describes : he conveys. It is not to be denied that the great names in the realist line are associated with a pronounced fondness for description. It is for this reason that we remind Miss Prescott of them. Let her take Balzac's "*Eugénie Grandet*," for instance. It will probably be affirmed that this story, the interest of which is to the full as *human* as that of her own, is equally elaborate in the painting of external objects. But such an assertion will involve a mistake : Balzac does not *paint*, does not copy, objects ; his chosen instrument being a pen, he is content to *write* them. He is literally real : he presents objects as they are. The scene and persons of his drama are minutely described. Grandet's house, his sitting-room,

his habits, his appearance, his dress, are all reproduced with the fidelity of a photograph. The same with Madame Grandet and Eugénie. We are exactly informed as to the young girl's stature, features, and dress. The same with Charles Grandet, when he comes upon the scene. His coat, his trousers, his watch-chain, his cravat, the curl of his hair, are all dwelt upon. We almost see the musty little sitting-room in which so much of the action goes forward. We are familiar with the gray *boiserie*, the faded curtains, the rickety card-tables, the framed samplers on the walls, Madame Grandet's foot-warmer, and the table set for the meagre dinner. And yet our sense of the human interest of the story is never lost. Why is this? It is because these things are all described *only in so far as they bear upon the action*, and not in the least for themselves. If you resolve to describe a thing, you cannot describe it too carefully. But as the soul of a novel is its action, you should only describe those things which are accessory to the action. It is in determining what things *are* so accessory that real taste, science, and judgment are shown.

The reader feels that Miss Prescott describes not in accordance with any well-considered plan, but simply for the sake of describing, and of so gratifying her almost morbid love of the picturesque. There is a reason latent in every one of Balzac's tales *why* such things should appear thus, and such persons so, — a clear, well-defined reason, easily discoverable by the observing and sympathetic eye. Each separate part is conducive to the general effect; and this general effect has been studied, pondered, analyzed: in the end it is produced. Balzac lays his stage, sets his scene, and introduces his puppets. He describes them once for all; this done, the story marches. He does not linger nervously about his figures, like a sculptor about his unfinished clay-model, administering a stroke here and affixing a lump there. He has done all this beforehand, in his thoughts; his figures are completed before the story begins. This latter fact is perhaps one of the most valuable in regard to Balzac. His story exists before it is told; it stands complete before his mind's eye. It was a characteristic of his mind, enriched as it was by sensual observation, to see his figures clearly and fully as with the eye of sense. So seeing them, the desire was irresistible to present them to the reader. How clearly he saw them we may judge from the minuteness of his presentations. It was clearly done because it was *scientifically* done. That word resumes our lesson. He set down things in black and white, not, as Miss Prescott seems vaguely to aim at doing, in red, blue, and green, — in prose, scientifically, as they stood. He aimed at local color; that is, at giving the facts of things. To determine these facts required labor, foresight,

reflection ; but Balzac shrank from no labor of eye or brain, provided he could adequately cover the framework of his story.

Miss Prescott's style is evidently the point on which she bases her highest claims to distinction. She has been taught that, in possessing this style, she possesses a great and uncommon gift. Nothing is more false. The fine writing in which "Azarian" abounds is the cheapest writing of the day. Every magazine-story bears traces of it. It is so widely adopted, because to a person of clever fancy there is no kind of writing that is so easy,—so easy, we mean, considering the effect produced. Of course it is much easier to write in a style which necessitates no looking out of words ; but such a style makes comparatively little impression. The manner in question is easy, because the writer recognizes no standard of truth or accuracy by which his performances may be measured. He does not transcribe facts,—facts must be counted, measured, weighed, which takes far too much trouble. He does not patiently study the nature and appearance of a thing until he has won from it the confession of that absolute appreciable quality, the correct statement of which is alone true description ; he does not commit himself to statements, for these are dangerous things ; he does not, in short, extract ; he affixes. He does not consult the object to be described, so recognizing it as a fact ; he consults his imagination, and so constitutes it a theme to be elaborated. In the picture which he proceeds to make, some of the qualities of the object will certainly be found ; but it matters little whether they are the chief distinctive ones,—any satisfy his conscience.

All writing is narration ; to describe is simply to narrate things in their order of place, instead of events in their order of time. If you consult this order, your description will stand ; if you neglect it, you will have an imposing mass of words, but no recognizable *thing*. We do not mean to say that Miss Prescott has a wholly commonplace fancy. (We use the word commonplace advisedly, for there are no commonplaces so vulgar as those chromatic epigrams which mark the Tennysonian prose school.) On the contrary, she has a fancy which would serve very well to garnish a dish of solid fiction, but which furnishes poor material for the body of the dish. These clever conceits, this keen eye for the superficial picturesque, this inborn love of *bric-à-brac* and sunsets, may be made very effectively to supplement a true dramatic exposition ; but they are a wretched substitute for such. And even in *bric-à-brac* and sunsets Miss Prescott's execution is crude. In her very specialty, she is but an indifferent artist. Who is so clever in the *bric-à-brac* line as M. Théophile Gautier ? He takes an occasional liberty with the French language ; but, on the whole, he finds

his best account in a policy of studious respect even for her most irritating forms of conservatism. The consequence is, that his efforts in this line are unapproachable, and, what is better, irreproachable. One of the greatest dangers to which those who pursue this line are liable is the danger that they may fall into the ridiculous. By a close adherence to that medium of expression which other forms of thought have made respectable, this danger is effectually set at naught. What is achieved by the paternally governed French tongue may surely be effected by that chartered libertine, our own. Miss Prescott uses far too many words, synonymous words and meaningless words. Like the majority of female writers, — Mrs. Browning, George Sand, Gail Hamilton, Mrs. Stowe, — she possesses in excess the fatal gift of fluency. Her paragraphs read as if in composition she completely ignored the expedient of erasure. What painter ever painted a picture without rubbing out and transposing, displacing, effacing, replacing? There is no essential difference of system between the painting of a picture and the writing of a novel. Why should the novelist expect to do what his fellow-worker never even hopes to acquire the faculty of doing, — execute his work at a stroke? It is plain that Miss Prescott adds, tacks on, interpolates, piles up, if we may use the expression; but it seems very doubtful if she often takes counsel of the old Horatian precept, — in plain English, to scratch out. A true artist should be as sternly just as a Roman father. A moderate exercise of this Roman justice would have reduced “*Azarian*” to half its actual length. The various descriptive passages would have been wonderfully simplified, and we might have possessed a few good pictures.

If Miss Prescott would only take such good old English words as we possess, words instinct with the meaning of centuries, and, having fully resolved upon that which she wished to convey, cast her intention in those familiar terms which long use has invested with almost absolute force of expression, then she would describe things in a manner which could not fail to arouse the sympathy, the interest, the dormant memories of the reader. What is the possible bearing of such phrases as “vermeil ardency,” or “a tang of color”? of such childish attempts at alliteration — the most frequent bugbear of Miss Prescott’s readers — as “studded with starry sprinkle and spatter of splendor,” and the following sentence, in which, speaking of the leaves of the blackberry-vine, she tells us that they are “damasked with deepening layer and spilth of color, brinded and barred and blotted beneath the dripping fingers of October, nipped by nest-lining bees,” — and, lastly, “suffused through all their veins with the shining soul of the mild and mellow season”?

This is nothing but "words, words, words, Horatio!" They express nothing; they only seem to express. The true test of the worth of a prose description — to simplify matters we leave poetry quite out of the question — is one's ability to resolve it back into its original elements. You construct your description from a chosen object; can you, conversely, from your description construct that object? We defy any one to represent the "fine scarlet of the blackberry vine," and "the gilded bronze of beeches," — fair sentences by themselves, which express almost as much as we can reasonably hope to express on the subject, — under the inspiration of the rhapsody above quoted, and what follows it. Of course, where so much is attempted in the way of expression, something is sometimes expressed. But with Miss Prescott such an occasional success is apt to be what the French call a *succès manqué*. This is the fault of what our authoress must allow us to call her inveterate bad taste; for whenever she has said a good thing, she invariably spoils it by trying to make it better: to let well enough alone is indeed in all respects the great lesson which experience has in store for her. It is sufficiently felicitous, for instance, as such things go, to call the chandelier of a theatre "a basket of light." There stands the simple successful image. But Miss Prescott immediately tacks on the assertion that it "pours down on all its brimming burden of lustre." It would be bad taste again, if it were not such bad physiology, to speak of Azarian's flaccid hair being "drenched with some penetrating perfume, an Oriental water that stung the brain to vigor." The idea that a man's intellectual mood is at the mercy of his *pommade* is one which we recommend to the serious consideration of barbers. The reader will observe that Azarian's hair is *drenched*: an instance of the habitual intensity of Miss Prescott's style. The word *intensity* expresses better than any other its various shortcomings, or rather excesses. The only intensity worth anything in writing is intensity of thought. To endeavor to fortify flimsy conceptions by the constant use of verbal superlatives is like painting the cheeks and pencilling the eyebrows of a corpse.

Miss Prescott would rightfully resent our criticism if, after all, we had no counsel to offer. Of course our advice is to take or to leave, but it is due to ourselves to produce it.

We would earnestly exhort Miss Prescott to be *real*, to be true to something. In a notice of Mr. Charles Reade recently published in the *Atlantic*, our authoress indulged in a fling at Mr. Anthony Trollope for what she probably considers his grovelling fidelity to minute social truths. But we hold it far better to be real as Mr. Trollope is real, than to be ideal after the fashion of the authoress of "Azarian." As in the writing of fiction there is no grander instrument than a potent imagination, such

as Mr. Hawthorne's, for instance, so there is no more pernicious dependence than an unbridled fancy. Mr. Trollope has not the imagination of Mr. Reade, his strong grasp of the possible ; but he has a delicate perception of the actual which makes every whit as firm ground to work upon. This delicate perception of the actual Miss Prescott would do well to cultivate : if Mr. Trollope is too distasteful to her, she may cultivate it in the attentive perusal of Mr. Reade, in whom there are many 'Trollopes. Let her not fear to grovel, but take note of what is, constitute herself an observer, and review the immeasurable treasures she has slighted. If she will conscientiously do this, she will need to invent neither new and unprecedented phases of humanity nor equally unprecedented nouns and adjectives. There are already more than enough for the novelist's purpose. All we ask of him is to use the material ready to his hand. When Miss Prescott reconciles herself to this lowly task, *then* and then only will she find herself truly rich in resource.

12. — *Lindisfarn Chase. A Novel.* By T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE. New York : Harper and Brothers. 1864. 8vo. pp. 274.

THIS is a fair specimen of a second-rate novel, a species of work which commands a certain degree of respect ; for second-rate novels are the great literary feature of the day. It is the work of a man who has no vocation for his task except a well-practised hand, and who would yet find it very hard that he should not write his novel with the rest. In the present condition of literature, when novel-writing is at once a trade and a pastime, books of this class are inevitable. Let us take them for what they are worth. Both in England and in this country they find an immense public of excellent persons, whose chief delight in literature is the contemplation of respectable mediocrity. Such works as "*Lindisfarn Chase*" are plentiful, because they are so easy to write ; they are popular, because they are so easy to read.

To compose a novel on the model before us, one must have seen a good many well-bred people, and have read a good many well-written novels. These qualifications are easily acquired. The novel of a writer who possesses them will be (if it is successful) a reflection of the manner of his social equals or inferiors and of his literary superiors. If it is unsuccessful, the reason will probably be that the author has sought inspiration in his social superiors. In the case of an attempted portraiture of a lower order of society, a series of false representations will not be so likely to prove fatal, because the critics and the reading public are not so well informed as to the facts. A book like "*Lindisfarn Chase*" might almost be written